

ARTICLE APPEARED

PAGE A-27

WASHINGTON POST  
29 November 1984

1

Richard Cohen

## ... And Two Futures

NEW YORK—In one courtroom sits William Westmoreland, commander of the debacle of Vietnam, and in another sits Ariel Sharon, commander of the debacle of Lebanon. They have both brought suit, one against CBS, one against Time, seeking to win in court the victory that eluded them on the battlefield. In the media age, Admiral Perry has been updated. Westmoreland and Sharon have met the enemy and they have sued.

But there the similarities end. Westmoreland is handsome, a profile on a recruiting poster, a soldier who in a by-gone era would have been a hero on horseback, but who in this one was forced to dismount to write memos. His testimony is replete with jargon, with meetings held and cables sent, with authority delegated and with crises caused not by the enemy in the field, but newspaper reports back in Washington that had the Pentagon brass in a dither.

Not so Sharon. Fat, slovenly, a pastry chef posing as a warrior, he is the unexpected man of action. Sitting in the dimness of the courtroom where the Rosenbergs were convicted, he describes how he went in the night to meet the Phalangists of Lebanon: "I was unarmed. I was met by a group of 10 or 15 armed Phalangists and put myself—I put my life—in their hands." Earlier he had discoursed on the nature of revenge in the Middle East, using the English word, the Arabic word, the Hebrew word.

Americans, of course, are more interested in the Westmoreland case. But his is an inconsequential trial since its effect on either the present or the future will be nil. He is suing CBS for saying in a documentary that he participated in a conspiracy to underestimate enemy strength. But whatever the truth of the charge, it hardly matters, and if Westmoreland had not sued, few would remember the documentary anyway. Vietnam was not lost because of troop estimates but because it should not have been fought in the first place.

This, though, is precisely the war Westmoreland is fighting all over again—the war against the war itself waged by critics in the media. It is a war against those who are perceived to have

caused the failure in Vietnam, those who, like the Jews of fascist imagination, stabbed the Army in the back for the lucre of circulation and ratings.

And so "Westy" is doing it all again, reviewing the memos and the meetings, the cables and the briefings, the grand strategy sessions with the CIA, DIA, CINCPAC, fighting his paper war one more time. An accountant in full battle dress, he now leads a charge of lawyers seeking to prove that his troop estimates were honest, that he would not lie about them to his commander in chief, even to win the war.

Sharon, on the other hand, would do anything to win a war. Because of him, Israeli troops stay and die in Lebanon. That was his war. He conceived it. He argued for it. And he carried it out.

He told the Cabinet he would take the Israeli army only 40 kilometers into Lebanon and he took it to Beirut. He said nothing about making war on Syria, but he did. He allowed the Phalange to go terrorist hunting in the Palestinian camps of Shatila and Sabra. The outcome sickened the world.

Not him! Sharon shouts. Not his fault, he insists. And so he has sued Time Magazine, charging it lied and accused him of egging on the Phalangists. He seeks the usual multi-million dollars, but what he really wants is a verdict of retroactive virginity, a finding that after all he knew, after all the killing between Christian and Moslem, that he could not have anticipated that the Phalangists would slaughter the innocent.

Even for Sharon this is gall, but as with Lebanon, he has not thought things through. To win, he must be judged an incompetent who learned nothing and forgot everything.

So in two different courtrooms two very different generals battle for two different reasons. Westmoreland soldiers on, but he is an old man and his war is behind him. Not so Sharon. He is an Israeli Cabinet member, a political force, a politician who may some day be prime minister. Westmoreland sues to reclaim the past, Sharon to claim the future. That makes all the difference. One man will fight no more. The other can hardly wait.